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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001490

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#)

SUBJECT: MDC LEADERS LOOKING TO RESOLVE DIFFERENCES, TAKE FIGHT TO ZANU-PF

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

¶11. (C) In an evening meeting on October 27, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai told the Ambassador that his meeting earlier that day with the MDC's other leaders had gone well. They had not resolved as yet the issue of participation in the Senate elections but had agreed that the struggle against President Mugabe outweighed their internal differences. The leadership was to meet again after the weekend at which time he expected a &face-saving8 solution to the dispute that would include agreement on an electoral boycott as the first step in a national program of action. The Ambassador encouraged Tsvangirai to prepare in advance for President Mugabe's counter-moves, such as using food to get out the vote. He warned that Mugabe might also try to distract attention from GOZ failures through some radical new initiative for which the MDC needed to be prepared. End Summary.

Intra-MDC Negotiations: Saving Face

¶12. (C) Tsvangirai told the Ambassador that the MDC's six senior leaders had met for over four hours earlier in the day to try to iron out differences over participation in the upcoming Senate elections. He said that from his perspective the meeting had gone well. The MDC leadership had not yet resolved their differences over participating in the Senate elections but they had agreed that the dispute must not outweigh their collective determination to stay united in the struggle against Mugabe.

¶13. (C) Moreover, Tsvangirai said that Brian Raftopoulos, a well-respected leader of Zimbabwe's civil society who had mediated the meeting, told the six that while Tsvangirai might have committed some technical breaches of the party's constitution, his view represented the true wishes of the party's rank and file. The other six, all of whom favored participation, had not disputed this, particularly in the wake of the nomination process, when nine of the twelve MDC provinces had backed Tsvangirai. Tsvangirai said the leadership had agreed to meet again on Monday next week and to agree on a face-saving way out of their current disagreement.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador said he hoped such a solution would not obscure for the other leaders the reality that Tsvangirai's had prevailed and that MDC supporters wanted the party to fight the regime not cooperate with it. Tsvangirai said he hoped his &Bulawayo colleagues8 would realize just that following the weekend. They were clearly feeling pressure from public opinion, even in Matabeleland, and really had no other good options. The Ndebele people would never countenance an alliance with ZANU-PF or Jonathon Moyo, and forming a party on their own made little sense. He also agreed with the Ambassador's assessment that they had hurt their image further by their trip to Pretoria to see President Mbeki. It had made them look both weak and disloyal.

Reenergized MDC's First Step: An Election Boycott

¶15. (C) Tsvangirai said the dispute had actually helped galvanize the party and its supporters and the key now was to agree on a national program of action against the regime. The first step in that national program should be a successful boycott, which would deny Mugabe the legitimacy he hoped to attain from the Senate elections. The Ambassador noted that in that regard that the 26 MDC candidates who had filed had done Tsvangirai a favor, since otherwise there would have been no election to boycott. The ZANU-PF candidates, running unopposed, would simply have been declared the winners, as had happened in nineteen districts. The best outcome now, to which Tsvangirai agreed, would be to

convince the candidates themselves to actively campaign for a boycott.

16. (C) The Ambassador also noted that ZANU-PF was likely to use any means at its disposal to prevent a successful boycott and that the MDC needed to be ready. In particular, there were reports that the ruling party would use food as a weapon to encourage voters to turn out. A purple thumb would result in a bag of maize. He suggested that a hunger strike by Tsangirai and other MDC leaders might be one way to

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counteract that tactic. Tsangirai said he had also given this thought and that another approach would be to encourage voters to take the food but then to spoil their ballots.

After the Election

17. (C) The Ambassador said the MDC also should try to anticipate Mugabe's next moves after the election. In that regard, the Ambassador noted the increasing number of reports that the military and police were demoralized by their poor salaries and were being downsized to save money. Mugabe might, for instance, look for a way to distract people from his government's failures by &discovering8 some sort of coup attempt or other conspiracy and in the process try to get rid of subordinates he considered disloyal.

18. (C) Tsangirai said the reports were true and that the situation was becoming increasingly dangerous as discontent within the ranks increased. He was convinced, however, that if the MDC took to the streets many of the police and military would refuse orders to break up the demonstrations. The Ambassador noted that Tsangirai's recent speech, in which he had criticized the government for not providing for the welfare of the troops, doubtless helped build that sort of good will.

Comment

19. (C) Tsangirai was relaxed and confident that he has carried the day. With nine of twelve provinces clearly backing him, we would agree. He believes his rivals within the MDC, principally the Ndebele leaders, are now in an untenable situation and will have to climb down from their position and to that end he is prepared to agree to an agreement that allows them to do so without being humiliated.

However, his generosity risks being misconstrued by some of his rivals, who are also committed to fighting the Mugabe regime, but from within a political system that is rigged against them. As we have noted before, the regime may be fragile but the opposition is in no position to capitalize on its weakness until it resolves its own internal debate over how best to confront the regime. That debate may finally be over next week.

DELL